

Testimony Before the
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands
Concerning H.R. 2937
February 14, 2002
Nevada State Assemblyman John J. Lee

Chairman Radanovich and members of the committee, I am Nevada State Assemblyman John J. Lee. I represent Clark County Assembly District No. 3, which is in the metropolitan Las Vegas area. I am appearing today on behalf of the Nevada State Legislature to speak in favor of H.R. 2937.

During its last session, the Nevada Legislature unanimously approved Assembly Joint Resolution No. 6 that calls upon Congress to support the release of property in Clark County controlled by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for the development of a regional shooting park.

In Nevada, as in many other parts of the western United States, firearms enthusiasts use public lands as a place to practice their hobby. Shooters go out into the desert with a few paper targets or a stack of tin cans to site in their rifles or hone their shooting skills. In recent years, the BLM or local governments have restricted shooting in many areas, forcing hobbyists to travel to more remote locations. Unfortunately, some ignore these restrictions and continue to shoot near settled areas.

As you may know, Las Vegas is the fastest growing metropolitan area in the nation. Las Vegas is located in an open desert surround by federal lands. Unlike most other cities, it does not have a surrounding buffer of farms and other private property. Instead, outlying housing developments are immediately adjacent to public lands where sports shooters have practiced for years and which they feel entitled to continue to use.

This situation poses a serious hazard to the public. Two years ago, a stray bullet killed a Las Vegas police officer. In November 1999, an errant round struck a vehicle in a local campground, and an accidental shooting recently killed a local man. Residents of outlying subdivisions are beginning to voice complaints about near misses and the dangers indiscriminate shooting poses to their lives and property.

The need for a shooting park is evident. The citizens of southern Nevada own an estimated 400,000 registered handguns and an untold number of hunting rifles and shot guns. About 13,000 citizens hold concealed weapons permits. These persons must periodically demonstrate their firearms proficiency. In addition, there are 3,000 police officers, several thousand private security guards, and a large number of other law enforcement personnel employed by the Nevada Highway Patrol, the FBI, the Secret Service and other state or federal agencies that need a safe, accessible area in which to train.

The proposed park would accommodate shooters of all kinds. This facility would address recreational needs, gun safety training classes, courses required for hunting licenses, and local and national competitive events. It would include facilities for archery, pistol practice, rifle shooting, and shotguns. It would incorporate a

variety of safety features, including buffer areas, backdrops, and safety berms. It would include access roads, parking areas, restrooms, and other facilities to make the area safe, comfortable, and convenient.

The proposed shooting park, which has been described to you today, would have several benefits. First, it would reduce the amount of indiscriminate shooting that occurs on the fringes of our city. This shooting poses a serious hazard. Shooters must share public lands with hikers, bicyclists, motorcyclists, off-road vehicle enthusiasts, horseback riders, and campers. In recent years, this competition among these various users of public lands has become more intense. In some cases, the BLM has closed parts of the public lands to shooters, leaving them with few areas in which they can pursue their sport. In addition, because the BLM does not have the staff to supervise these activities, the danger of indiscriminate shooting has increased even in areas where shooting has been banned.

Second, unsupervised shooting on public lands poses environmental problems. In many areas, shooters leave behind garbage and debris, harm wildlife, cut dusty trails and roads, or vandalize natural wilderness areas. Providing a suitable location for shooting can reduce these problems.

Third, the shooting park would replace facilities in the Las Vegas area that must be closed in the near future because of encroaching development. These include a police firearms training facility operated by the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department and an archery range that must be relocated to make way for the development of a wetlands park. In addition, several private shooting clubs have recently been forced to close by nearby residential or commercial developments.

Fourth, the regional shooting range would provide a venue for regional and national shooting competitions, adding an important attraction to our area's tourist-based economy, which has been severely effected by the recent fall in tourist travel.

This project has the enthusiastic support of the Legislature and the people of Nevada. It has been endorsed by our law enforcement agencies, sports shooting clubs, the Sierra Club, and other environmental groups. In the entire time I have worked on this issue, I have yet to encounter anyone who is opposed to this project.

In conclusion, speaking on behalf of the Nevada Legislature and my own constituents in southern Nevada, I urge this subcommittee to approve the measure that you have before you today.

Thank you.

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